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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 003789

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: SPANTA PLUGS KABUL CONFERENCE

REF: A. KABUL 3773

[1](#)B. KABUL 3742

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Convening a meeting of foreign ambassadors on November 25, Afghan Foreign Minister Rameen Spanta highlighted the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's (GIROA's) request that a high-level conference, hopefully at the ministerial level, be convened in Kabul in early 2010. His request was met with general assent, with the British, American, German and Indian representatives speaking up to voice their agreement. The UK suggested the Kabul conference might be in March or April. There was widespread agreement that any Kabul conference as well as the 28 January London conference and their preparations be Afghan led. In a private meeting thereafter with Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs Wayne, Spanta said Karzai had told him on November 24 that he would not accept having a London conference prior to a Kabul conference. Spanta indicated that Karzai may still be upset that the January 28 date had been made public before PM Brown had sought his agreement to that date. In any case, Spanta said that he saw the wisdom of having the Kabul event in the spring to allow for good preparation, but Karzai was not yet in agreement. He also expressed concern that Foreign Ministers might not agree to meet again in Kabul so soon after London. Spanta specifically asked for assurance that Secretary Clinton would be willing to return to Kabul in March or April for a ministerial meeting. End Summary.

Afghan First?

[1](#)2. (C) Foreign Minister Spanta convened over forty ambassadors and international representatives to the Foreign Ministry on November 25 to discuss potential upcoming conferences on Afghanistan. In that discussion (see paras 4-7), Spanta accepted that there would be a London conference on January 28 and discussed the idea of holding a second conference in Kabul with the general assumption that it would be held in March or April. However, the Foreign Minister indicated during a private follow-on meeting with Ambassador Wayne that Karzai was upset at not having been notified in advance before the January 28 conference date was made public by the UK Prime Minister. Spanta noted that Karzai had many times asked for the Kabul conference to be held first and that he (Spanta) had asked for US support for the concept in his meeting with Secretary Clinton in September. While Karzai has subsequently accepted the UK proposal, Spanta warned of a "strong possibility" that President Karzai would try to convene a Kabul conference in mid-January to ensure that the Kabul conference would occur first.

[1](#)3. (C) Spanta cited a conversation he had with President Karzai on November 24 in which Karzai stressed that he wanted a ministerial meeting in Kabul first. Spanta said he

understood the difficulties of getting such a meeting well prepared by mid-January given that Afghan ministers would be new to their jobs and the end-of-year holidays would inhibit work. He said he would try to convince Karzai of the wisdom of having the Kabul ministerial meeting in March or April. The Minister said, however, that he was concerned that it would be difficult to convene a ministerial-level conference just months after London, which would also be at the ministerial level. He particularly requested that Secretary Clinton make every effort to attend the Kabul conference. Ambassador Wayne said he would pass that request to Washington. Wayne also raised the idea of holding a JCMB meeting in Kabul prior to London where Afghan ministers could lay out their view of the agendas work plans for London and a subsequent Kabul conference, as a way to address some of the President's concerns. Spanta offered no direct response other than to reiterate Karzai's concern that he had not been informed prior to the announcement of the London date.

Setting the Agenda

¶4. (C) In the larger ambassadorial meeting, Spanta was sanguine, describing a Kabul conference as complementary to the London conference. Linking the two conferences, and creating synergy between them, Spanta noted, would be crucial to their success. Spanta had also reviewed and approved of SRSG Kai Eide's proposals earlier this year for the conferences, and said he especially appreciated Eide's goal of ensuring Afghan-ownership of the conferences. Spanta recommended that both conferences address security, reconstruction, development, anti-corruption and good

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governance. He stressed the importance of the Afghan audience for these meetings. "The time for talking about Afghanistan is over," he said. "The time has come for the Afghans to talk among themselves about how they will move their country forward." He acknowledged that the London conference will help shore up support for donor countries with their domestic audiences, with a message showing a transition will take place to Afghan ownership.

¶5. (C) Several attending ambassadors voiced their strong support for the Kabul conference. British Ambassador Sedwill sought to justify the choice of January 28 for the London conference. Following Karzai's impressive inaugural speech, Sedwill said, the international community needs to develop a plan to help support Karzai's stated initiatives. Further, the international community may likely have to reshape its plans for Afghanistan in light of President Obama's decision next week. London would provide the international community a venue to coordinate adjustments to their strategies, but a Kabul conference was very important.

¶6. (C) As for the agenda, Ambassador Sedwill said, "we are in your hands." He stressed the need to boost flagging public support in donor countries. The Kabul conference should come second in March or April, he argued, because Karzai needs time to select his new government and to develop his agenda. The Kabul conference will offer Karzai's new administration the chance to "make their pitch" to the Afghan people, he suggested. The German Ambassador seconded the UK remarks, saying that "Karzai has said all the right words, and now we're waiting for him to do the right deeds." The Kabul conference, he said, will give Karzai the means to show how he intends to fulfill the promises laid out in his inaugural speech.

¶7. (C) On the issue of the agendas for the two conferences, the Indian Ambassador stressed that equal attention must be paid to all of the key issues confronting Afghanistan, not just security, as some had suggested. The EU Ambassador argued that the conference should be on a political level, not overly focused on security, and that holding a subsequent

conference in Kabul would present a rich symbolic opportunity for the Afghan government to boost its political credibility in the eyes of its people. Putting in a plug for Afghan leadership of the conference, the UNAMA Deputy SRSG underscored the importance of having Afghans take the lead on developing the agenda, suggesting a series of meetings convened by the Afghans in Kabul with UNAMA and key donors. (Privately, Spanta told Ambassador Wayne that a working group of key Afghan ministries would be assembled to work with the international community to build the agendas.) In the broader discussion, Wayne argued that Afghan leadership in the conferences and in setting the agendas was a priority and noted the importance placed on moving ahead with implementing the vision discussed by President Karzai in his inauguration speech. Both in the broader discussion and in private with Spanta, Wayne also stressed the importance of good preparatory work and collaboration to make sure that the Kabul conference reflected well-developed plans of action for achieving agreed objectives.

Sub-national vs National-level Assistance

18. (C) Privately, Spanta also mentioned to Wayne that he had heard rumors the United States and other donors were considering allocating the bulk of their countries' development funds for the provinces, thus bypassing the central government. Ambassador Wayne clarified that Embassy Kabul's approach is to enhance the capacity of local and district governance in ways that strengthen the links between Kabul, the provinces and districts. The goal, he stressed, is not to take money or resources away from the central government, but to work on improving the connection between Kabul and the provinces and the delivery of services to the population. The IDLG has been asked to come up with a pilot district governance program, for example, with the goal of making the central government more legitimate by enhancing its ties on the local level. Spanta expressed agreement with this approach, but said he was very concerned with reports of programs which might serve independent local power bases: Afghanistan has suffered too much from local and regional power holders, he said.

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